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GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

By Stan Sorkin, President
Connecticut Food Association
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TESTIMONY CONCERNING HB No. 5349: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CHEESES SHOP WINE AND BEER PERMIT

The Connecticut Food Association (CFA) is the state trade association that conducts programs in public affairs, food safety, research, education and industry relations on behalf of its 240 member companies—food retailers, wholesalers, distributors, and service providers in the state of Connecticut. CFA's members in Connecticut operate approximately 300 retail food stores and 130 pharmacies. Their combined estimated annual sales volume of \$5.7 billion represents 75% of all retail food store sales in Connecticut. CFA's retail membership is composed of independent supermarkets, regional firms, and large multi-store chains employing over 30,000 associates. The majority of our members are family owned privately owned supermarkets. Our goal is to create a growth oriented economic climate that makes Connecticut more competitive with surrounding states.

The Connecticut Food Association is intrigued by the concept of a Cheese Shop Wine and Beer Permit. Cheese shops can be found in the vast majority of stores and are an important part of the mix of products we offer to our customers. For years, the CFA has believed that wine is the perfect accompaniment to food and has lobbied that grocery stores should be allowed to sell wine. That begs the questions- Would grocery stores be able to apply for a Cheese Shop Wine and Beer Permit since we operate cheese shops with in our stores? If the answer is "Yes", we would be in favor of HB No. 5349.

If the answer is "NO", we would be opposed to HB No. 5349. This committee is very much aware of the current permit structure and the history behind any attempt to change these regulations. A grocery beer permit currently has a fee of \$1500, almost three times the cost of a package store permit which allows the sale of beer, wine, and spirits. Adding a new permit for cheese shops to sell beer would dilute the value of a grocery store permit since more outlets would be able to sell beer.